

SWTS- Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

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Purpose

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to outline SWTS approach to managing dissatisfaction, formal complaints and appeals of students, clients, staff and other members of the community. It provides a transparent approach for all complaints and appeals to be addressed in a fair, efficient, and confidential manner.

This policy and procedure ensure compliance with Standard 6 of the Standards.

Definitions

Appeal means a request for a decision made by SWTS to be reviewed

Complaint means a person's formal expression of dissatisfaction with any product or service provided by SWTS

Services means training, assessment, related educational and support services and/or activities related to the recruitment of prospective learners. It does not include services such as student counselling, mediation or ICT support

Standards means the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 of the VET Quality Framework

VRQA means Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority which is responsible for the regulation of education and training providers and qualifications in Victoria.

AQTF Australian Quality Training Framework is the national set of standards which assures nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services for the clients of Australia's vocational education and training system.

Policy

1. Nature of complaints and appeals

- SWTS responds to all allegations involving the conduct of:
 - The RTO, its trainers and assessors and other staff.
 - Any student or client of SWTS.
- Complaints may be made in relation to any of SWTS services and activities such as:
 - the application and enrolment process
 - marketing information
 - the quality of training and assessment provided
 - training and assessment matters, including student progress, student support and assessment requirements
 - the way someone has been treated
 - the actions of another student
- An appeal is a request for a decision made by SWTS to be reviewed. Decisions may have been about:
 - course admissions
 - refund assessments
 - response to a complaint
 - assessment outcomes / results
 - other general decisions made by SWTS
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2. Principles of resolution

- SWTS is committed to developing a procedurally fair complaints and appeals process that is carried out free from bias, following the principles of natural justice. Through this policy and procedure, SWTS ensures that complaints and appeals:
 - Are responded to in a consistent and transparent manner.
 - Are responded to promptly, objectively, with sensitivity and confidentiality.
 - Are able to be made at no cost to the individual.
 - Are used as an opportunity to identify potential causes of the complaint or appeal and take actions to prevent the issues from recurring as well as identifying any areas for improvement.

- SWTS will inform all persons or parties involved in any allegations made as well as providing them with an opportunity to present their side of the matter.
- Nothing in this policy and procedure limits the rights of an individual to take action under Australia's Consumer Protection laws and it does not circumscribe an individual's rights to pursue other legal remedies.
- Where a student chooses to access this policy and procedure, this will be available on SWTS website

3. Timeframes for resolution

Complaints and appeals will be finalised as soon as practicable or at least within 30 calendar days unless there is a significant reason for the matter to take longer. In matters where additional time is needed, the complainant or appellant will be advised in writing of the reasons and will be updated weekly on the progress of the matter until such a time that the matter is resolved.

4. Records of complaints and appeals

SWTS will maintain a record of all complaints and appeals and their outcomes on the *Complaints and Appeals Register*, which will be securely stored according to the Privacy Policy and Procedures.

5. Making a complaint or appeal

- Complaints about a particular incident should be made within ninety (90) calendar days of the incident occurring and appeals must be made within thirty (30) calendar days of the original decision being made.
- Complaints and appeals must be made in writing using the *Complaints and Appeals Form*, or other written format and sent to SWTS head office at 147-155 Hogans Road, Hopper Crossing attention to the RTO Director.
- When making a complaint or appeal, provide as much information as possible to enable SWTS to investigate and determine an appropriate solution. This should include:
 - The issue you are complaining about or the decision you are appealing – describe what happened and how it affected you.
 - Any evidence you have to support your complaint or appeal.
 - Details about the steps you have already taken to resolve the issue.
 - Suggestions about how the matter might be resolved.
- All complaints and appeals will be acknowledged in writing via email or post within 7 days.

6. Resolution of complaints and appeals

- Some or all members of the management team of SWTS will be involved in resolving complaints and appeals as outlined in the procedures.
- Where a complaint or appeal involves another individual or organisation, they will be given the opportunity to respond to any allegations made.
- Where a third-party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO is involved, they will be included in the process of resolving the complaint or appeal.
- In the case of an assessment appeal, an assessor who is independent from the original decision will assess the original task again. The outcome of this assessment will be the result granted for the assessment task.

7. Independent parties

- SWTS acknowledges the need for an appropriate independent party to be appointed to review a matter where this is requested by the complainant or appellant and the internal processes have failed to resolve the matter. Costs associated with independent parties to review a matter must be covered by the complainant/appellant unless the decision to include an independent party was made by SWTS.
- SWTS may also appoint the independent party to be involved in the resolution of a complaint or appeal where it is deemed necessary.
- The independent party recommended by SWTS is e.g. Mediators, ACPET, consultant, note this can't be VRQA who may have a cost per matter, however complainants and appellants are able to use their own external party at their own cost.
- SWTS will provide complete cooperation with the external mediator investigating the complaint/appeal and will be bound by the recommendations arising out of this process.
- The Director will ensure that any recommendations made are implemented within twenty (20) days of being notified of the recommendations. The complainant or appellant will also be formally notified in writing of the outcome of the mediation.

8. External complaint avenues

- SWTS agrees to respond to and cooperate in good faith with any complaints handling mechanism or process established by VRQA or the Department from time to time for the purpose of resolving student complaints or other issues in relation to the delivery of services.
- Complaints can be made externally through the following avenues:

- National Complaints Hotline:

The National Training Complaints Hotline is a national service for consumers to register complaints concerning vocational education and training. The service refers consumers to the appropriate agency/authority/jurisdiction to assist with their complaint. Consumers can register a complaint with the National Training Complaints Hotline by:

- Phone: 13 38 73, Monday - Friday, 8am to 6pm nationally.
- Email: skilling@education.gov.au

For more information about the National Complaints Hotline, refer to the following webpage:

https://www.google.com/search?q=national+training+complaints+hotline&rlz=1C1GCEA_enAU894AU894&oq=National+Complaints+Hotline&aqs=chrome.1.0l3.3511j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

- VRQA

Complainants may also complain to SWTS RTO's registering body: VRQA

However, VRQA will only use the information you provide to inform its regulatory approach and will not contact SWTS on behalf of the complainant or act as their advocate. For more information, refer to the following webpage:

<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/complaints/Pages/tovrqa.aspx>

- Department of Education and Training

Complaints relating to government funded training under the Skills First funding contract can be made to the Department of Education and Training. The Department is principally concerned with complaints regarding RTO misconduct including unethical and fraudulent practices. If a party wishes to make a complaint to the Department, they can do so by:

- Downloading the Department's complaint form, available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/compliancecomplain.aspx>; and
- Returning the completed form to the following email address vtg.feedback@edumail.vic.gov.au; or
- Alternatively, the party can post the completed complaint form to:
Deputy Secretary, Higher Education and Skills Group
c/- Executive Director, Training Market Operations
GPO Box 4367
Melbourne, Victoria 3001
- If the complaint remains unresolved South West Training Services will refer the complaint to the Dispute Resolution Centre at the Victorian Department of Justice for their assessment, advice and services for settling the dispute.

Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria

4/456 Lonsdale St

Melbourne VIC 3000

Tel: 03 9603 8370

Tel: 1800 658 528 (toll free for regional callers)

Email: dscv@justice.vic.gov.au

9. Publication

- This policy and procedure will be published in the Student Handbook and on SWTS website to ensure it is publicly available.

Procedures

VRQA Guideline	Guideline 2.7, 2.8
AQTF:	2.7, 3.41.1, 2.2, 3.2
Standards (SRTOs):	Clause 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 & 6.6
VET Funding	Clause 12
Contract:	Schedule 1 – Clause 1.6

1. Complaints management

Procedure	Responsibility
<p>A. Receive and acknowledge complaint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per policy, complaints are to be made in writing by the complainant, attention to the Director. The Director should review all complaints upon receipt. Acknowledge receipt of complaint in writing by sending a letter to complainant within 3 working days of receipt. Use <i>Complaint/ Appeal Acknowledgement Letter</i>. Record details of the complaint on the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i>. 	Director Compliance Manager
<p>B. Investigate the complaint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upon receiving the complaint, the matter is to be investigated to ensure all relevant information is available and it is accurate and complete. Further details from the complainant, respondent or other involved parties may be requested during this stage. This may be in writing, over the phone, or face-to-face. If the matter is in relation to a third party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO, the third party should be involved in the resolution of the complaint. The Director will review the information and decide on an appropriate response. Where deemed necessary by the Director, the matter may be reviewed by other members of the management team to arrive at an appropriate resolution. Note: The complaint must be completely resolved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the original complaint. If the matter is particularly complex and it is going to take longer to resolve, the complainant is to 	Director

Procedure	Responsibility
be advised in writing along with reasons for the extra time. They must be provided with updates on progress on a weekly basis thereafter until the matter is resolved.	
C. Advise of the outcome and update records <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a written response to the complainant outlining: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The RTO’s understanding of the complaint – The steps taken to investigate and resolve the complaint – Decisions made about resolution, with reasons for the decisions made – Areas that have been identified as possible causes of the complaint and improvements to be recommended – Their right to access the appeals process if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints process. • Update the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i> so it includes the outcome of the complaint. • Update the <i>Continuous Improvement Register</i> if applicable for any improvements to be made as an outcome. • Keep a copy of the complaint and supporting documents in the Complaints file and in the student or staff file (where relevant). 	Director Compliance Manager
D. Review complaints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the complaints process and its outcome at the next management meeting to consider whether there are any improvements to be made to prevent recurrence. 	Management team

2. Appeals management

Procedure	Responsibility
A. Receive and acknowledge appeal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon receipt of a request for an appeal, acknowledge receipt of appeal in writing by sending a letter to appellant within 3 working days of receipt to ensure appellant receives it within 7 days. • Record details of appeal on the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i>. 	Director Compliance Manager
B. Respond to assessment appeals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the case of appeals against assessment decisions, the original 	Director Compliance

Procedure	Responsibility
<p>assessment decision will be reviewed by having an assessor independent of the original decision, mark the assessment task again.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assessment decision made during the appeals process will be considered the actual assessment outcome for the task. Advise the student of the outcome of the appeal as per point G below. 	Manager
<p>C. Respond to appeals against non-academic decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upon receiving the appeal, the matter is to be investigated to identify the original decision made and the reasons for the decision. Further details from the appellant, respondent, the person who made the original decision, or other involved parties may be requested during this stage. This may be in writing, over the phone, or face-to-face. If the matter is in relation to a third party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO, the third party should be involved in the resolution of the appeal. The appellant may request for an independent party (mediator) to be involved in the process. Where this is requested by the appellant, they will bear the costs associated. Additionally, SWTS may decide to call upon an independent mediator to assist to resolve the issue where a decision cannot be reached internally. This will be at SWTS cost. SWTS Management team will review all relevant information and decide on an appropriate response. Note: The appeal must be resolved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the original appeal. If the matter is particularly complex and it is going to take longer to resolve, the appellant must be advised in writing along with reasons for the extra time. They must be provided with progress updates on a weekly basis thereafter until the matter is resolved. 	Management team
<p>D. Advise appellant of the outcome and update records</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a written response to the appellant outlining: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RTO's understanding of the reasons for the appeal The steps taken to investigate and resolve the appeal Decisions made about resolution and reasons for the decisions Areas that have been identified as possible causes of the appeal 	Director Compliance Manager

Procedure	Responsibility
<p>and improvements to be recommended</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i> so it includes the outcome of the appeal. Update the <i>Continuous Improvement Register</i> if applicable for any improvements to be made as an outcome. Keep a copy of the appeal and supporting documents in the Appeals file and in the student or staff file (where relevant). 	
<p>E. Review appeals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the appeal and its outcome at the next management meeting to consider whether there are any improvements to be made to prevent recurrence. 	Director Compliance Manager

3. Reviews by independent party

Procedure	Responsibility
<p>A. Appoint and cooperate with mediator/ independent party</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A complainant or appellant may request that an independent party is involved in resolution of the matter. The independent party may use the RTO's selected mediator or may seek their own at their cost. The Director may also decide that an independent party is required to resolve particularly complex matters or in situations where there may be bias. Contact independent mediator to arrange mediation/ review. SWTS will co-operate fully in the process of the external party reviewing and investigating matter. This will include providing access to the relevant information surrounding the complaint or appeal and the internal complaints records where permitted to do so by law. All staff must cooperate in such instances and to give an accurate account of the events as they understand them. 	Director Compliance Manager

4. External complaint or appeal

Procedure	Responsibility
<p>A. External complaint or appeal</p>	Director

Procedure	Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If dissatisfied with the internal processes, the complainant/appellant may initiate an external complaint or appeal. • If requested, SWTS will respond as necessary. SWTS agrees to respond to and cooperate in good faith with any complaints handling mechanism or process established by VRQA or the Department from time to time for the purpose of resolving student complaints or other issues in relation to the delivery of services. • All records will be kept on file. • Fully co-operate with external party to respond to the complaint as required. • Discuss the external process and its outcome at the next management meeting to consider whether there are any improvements to be made to prevent recurrence. 	Compliance Manager

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AQTF:	2.7, 3.41.1,2.2, 3.2
Standards (SRTOs):	Clause 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 & 6.6
Skills First Funding Contract:	Clause 12 Schedule 1 – Clause 1.6